

Apropos Spain and Spaniards in the US Civil War (1861-1865)¹

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1. An Introduction to the Transnational scene

American civil War was not only the re-building of the nation, as many authors have said, but the moment American diplomacy had to endeavor a new transnational way (Fiorentino 2015:201-217). When the British colonies in America first fought for the Independence, American people battled too for an influence next to European nations -France, Great Britain and Spain- in the western hemisphere and around the globe. Being that of isolation a sentiment that flowed throughout US history, the world had become an increasingly interconnected one, where US, as any country might do, had to solve inner problems with the world's answers. Isolation was not in fashion in Lincoln's time, though President wanted to keep the Civil War out of the international affairs.

Even more, from the 1850's to 1860's nations have rarely been willing to go ahead without the United States. In the Civil War epoch the chaos among European interests pushed US foreign affairs to avoid external problems, related to different kinds of wars and imperialist ambitions. Both, Union and the Confederacy were involved in their own violent facts, but the two nations had to take notice about the US existence within an expansive world frame (Roberston 1989) (Huguet 2015: 257-282). The wider the Atlantic became to the North, the narrower Confederacy wanted it to be, both nations involved in the European political events and of course in its effects on the American continent.

Union foreign policies were not haphazard at all, on the contrary of the Confederate government diplomacy. trying to show nations its identity. As the European recognition was a central point of the South diplomacy, the Confederate States of America clamored for it, seeing with fear that Great Britain recognition did not happen. If Union was capable to fight alone and win the war, Confederacy did not. To be an independent nation needed foreign aid (Hubard 1862) (Blumenthal 1966:151). The Union government insisted to design the war as an internal matter, asking the nations not to recognize a legitimate Confederacy.

Europe countries, even worker classes, were not very fond of Lincoln presidency and its foreign policy was in the contrary way of a friendship one. The hegemonic nations –Russia, Great Britain. France, even Spain or Austria and Prussia-, were thinking of their historical right to an intervention in the American regions. So, as President was closing the South Ports and controlling the Sea trade, Lincoln's policies seemed arrogant to them. The blockade –nations said- was illegal because the 'law of nations' and the Paris Convention, established that only the ports of the rebels could be closed, but not the blockades –that mean, with the rights of prize and capture, could only be imposed on *nations* (Guelzo 2004:43).

Finally, Slavery was not a significant matter to European nations, because most of them had solved it. Nevertheless, it was not trivial the trade questions. Europe understood the Union blockade imposed on southern ports a unilateral and wrong decision, though this *coup de force* was not enough for them to come to a decision of recognizing Confederacy as a legitimate new

state. Nor even the *cotton embargo* that Davis administration instituted made foreign governments to declare war to the Union, thought South longed for and the English power had liked to. The huge cotton surpluses in French and English factories were enough not to have to feel pushed into a transatlantic war stock huge (Howard 2010). Europeans were procuring cotton from elsewhere in their empires, even from the North production.

2. Spain Diplomacy in American Civil War

Thought recent diplomatic histories of the American Civil War searches Spanish foreign policy and Spain's relations with the Union and Confederacy (Bowen 2011: 34-54), most traditional US diplomacy studies of the American Civil War have ignored Spain in its that epoch capital influence in the Caribbean Region. And that is obviously a great mistake, because in the years that war took place -1861 to 1865- before and after, Spain colonial situation made Madrid to become an strategic capital of diplomacy, moreover if thinking Spanish governments wanted to profit instability in the region to regain the lost influence as the Power it had used to be. Nevertheless it is well known that from the late 1850s Prime Minister Leopoldo O'Donnell (1856, 1858-1863) had revived military and naval potentials of Spain looking for a renewed prestige, lost in the Spanish American Wars of Independence (1808-1833) and the Independence of its American possessions.

In the mid Century, during the Queen Isabel II's Monarchy governments (1833-1868), Spain had resisted two civil wars: the First Carlist War (1833-39) and Second Carlist War (1846-49) that

knocked significant military sources. In the beginning of the war, Carlism and reactionary monarchism in Spain had been defeated, thought its resurgence was always to be care of. Now, Confederacy made a great diplomatic effort to interest Spain to support the new state, a fact that historians have minus valuated in comparison with Great Britain or France hypothetic sustenance (Cancio 2015).

A great instability moved into the country. The Spanish political situation between 1861 and 1865 was turmoil in cabinets. But Madrid was also rebuilding its naval fleet, which had 170 new ships in the 1860s. By 1860, Spain was the fourth largest naval power in the world in terms of firepower and displacement. From only fifteen principal ships in early 1859s, at the end of 1860s Spain had got armored frigates, steam-powered warships, schooner, vessels... and builds dozens of ships in their dry own docks and also contracted with France and Great Britain. Along with these rising capabilities Spain became involved in expensive overseas operations, either alone or in concert with its Great Power allies, even if all that was left of the once extensive Spanish Empire was, Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and Guam.

In the late 1850s and early 1860s, Spain was pursuing an aggressive foreign policy. Spain opted not to assist France and Britain in the Crimean War, but it sent six frigates and 1,000 troops from Manila to assist France in Cochin China in 1857. In April 1861, the Spanish government sent 3,000 troops from Cuba to occupy Santo Domingo. Spain officially annexed the territory two months later, and increased the military strength in Santo Domingo to 20,000 troops by 1862. In 1861-1862, during the first year of the American Civil War, Spain joined Britain and France in

a punitive military expedition against Mexico, forcing the Benito Juarez government to make good on its international debts. The initial allied force consisted of 6,200 Spanish troops from Cuba, under the command of General Juan Prim y Prats, alongside 700 British and 2,000 French troops. Spanish and British forces withdrew from Mexico after a few months, although French troops stayed, and eventually took Mexico City and established the Mexican Empire.

The Spanish government was pleased to see the breakup and weakening of the United States in 1861 (Kanellos, 1997: 210-211). In the Civil War, the Confederate States of America and Spain could be “*natural allies*”, because Spain was a more likely ally for the South than Britain or France. Spain had kept slavery in its Caribbean territories while Britain rejected slavery in 1833 and France in 1848. Spain and the United States had poor relations dating back to the American support for Spanish American Wars of Independence in the early nineteenth century. The Monroe Doctrine (1823) was aimed at preventing Spain from reclaiming lost Latin American states. Spain feared American expansionism, as well as US efforts to dominate Latin America and seize Spain’s remaining colonies of Cuba and Puerto Rico.

So, to the world, Spain was not asleep any more. New horizons appeared in sight. In 1860 fall, a pre-war critical phase in relations between Spain and the States, was Santo Domingo’s one. Some Dominican diplomats requested –Santana’s Plan– a Spanish protectorate to keep the island away from the US annexation. Even if the island returned to Spain as the colony it was, before many of Santo Domingo’s people asked for the

Spanish control (Gándara y Navarro 1884). United States Secession in course was an enough problem to the US as to accept some kind of agreement between Spain and the island that not included the annexation. Nevertheless, all the prudence in the secret negotiation did not avoid US government opposition to any kind of nearness of the two Hispanic countries. By the 1861 spring Spain decided to give its protection to Santo Domingo, leaving the annexation for a future time. As European troops withdrawal of the North American territory, because of the evacuation of Spanish soldiers to Cuba, after Mexican expedition, Lincoln administration in war felt some relief.

Then, Mexico's question pulled Spain to renew interest in American policies, so that, during the American Civil War, Spain was involved in the Mexican wars (Cortada 1980: 41-51). In late 1861 sixty-two hundred Spanish soldiers were sent to Mexico, Juan Prim commanding this army. In the famous tripartite intervention, they joined to the thousands of French and British military units with the intention to push Mexican Benito Juarez's government to stop its liberal revolution and go on paying debts to European powers. Nevertheless, British government and the Spanish one abandoned the Mexican cause because of the French intention to occupy the territory for it to become a colony of France (The French attempts to install Archduke Maximilian accelerated in late 1862). General Prim -who visited the White House and the Army of the Potomac in June 1862 (Golphwaite 1913:62-65) (Conyngham 1867: 163-181)- brought troops back home as the same time British army did. The International press echoes of the prudence of Spanish point of view. For instance, the

Madrid Gazette said that orders had been transmitted to General Prim to negotiate upon the part of Spain only after the entry into the city of Mexico shall have taken place, that could be read in the *Supplement to the Australian Weekly Chronicle*, Adelaide, may 10, 1862. But in Spain, Conservatives accused General Prim of the damage of the country prestige could become from his actions.

3. Hispanic and Spaniards immersed in the American Civil War

Over the last two centuries, each ethnic group that makes up the mosaic called America celebrates on Memorial Day its contribution to the country (United States Census Bureau 2008), and there is a Hispanic American place in those celebrations according to the Defense Department (Schmal 1999). This place mostly is occupied with those who were born in the American Republics that speak Spanish, but when talking about the first century of the nation it is not easy to distinguish Spanish from Hispanic. Many of the Hispanic patriots or heroes in US wars may had born in a Spanish territory as Cuba or Puerto Rico Island or just emigrated from Spain to the New World –the independent Latin American's Republics, in order to do *las Américas*, that means making money and coming back home.

But what did US Americans know about Spain in 1861? Almost nothing at all.

Confederate Comander Pettigrew was one of the US american who did know Spain because he had travelled to the Country. In 1861 Petigrew had published the book *Notes on Spain and the Spaniards* (Pettigrew 1861), those days the only popular

resource to know Spain, making difference with the Hispanic territories or countries. Pettigrew's book explains his experiences and impressions, being a magnificent example of the antebellum Southern intellectuals of that time, truly concerned by abroad issues. Eager to immerse himself in Iberian and Mediterranean cultures, he describes politics and expresses his sympathy for the troubles of peasant societies or shows keen empathy of ancient contributions to Spanish history.

Certainly, the American Civil War showed US Americans Spanish persons now celebrities because of serving bravely North and South. For example the Hispanic Union Admiral, named David G. Farragut, who was the most famous and the highest ranking Hispanic officer in the Civil War. His father had born in Spain coming to the US in 1776. In 1862, Farragut successfully commanded Union forces at the capture of New Orleans. While commanding Federal naval forces during the Battle at Mobile Bay in Alabama, Farragut uttered the famous slogan: "Damn the torpedoes. Full steam ahead" He received the Medal of Honor, the highest and most prestigious military award given for valor. Captain Carlos Alvarez de la Mesa, fought for the Union in the American Civil War, and wrote in Spanish language more than two hundred letters addressed to his American wife, Frances Taft, dating from 1861 to 1871. They have been preserved in the Alvarez de la Mesa Collection.

But there were not only men heroes. Coming from Spanish territories there were some exceptional women, as the Cuban-born Loretta Velasquez, a woman Confederate soldier masquerading as a man at First Manassas (Huguet 2012), who

ended her military career –unmasked- working as a Confederate spy. Or Lola Sánchez, a Florida American woman of Cuban descent, who became a Confederate spy aiding the South army. Son of a Spanish immigrant in the US, Captain Luis F. Emilio became one of the original officers of the 54th selected by Massachusetts War Governor John Albion Andrew. He fought with the 54th for three years showing what was describe as ferocity and surviving other officers killed or wounded. His memoirs, called *A, Brave Black Regiment* were the basis for the Academy Award-winning film, *Glory*. Finally, born in Puerto Rico, Lieutenant Augusto Rodriguez served as an officer in the Union 15th Connecticut Volunteer Infantry, in the defenses of Washington, D.C.

And of course, Liutenant-Colonel Federico Fernández Cavada (1831-1871), a Cuban born in Cienfuegos, that served the Union army with distinction, commanding the 114th Pennsylvania Volunteer infantry regiment. Fernández Cavada was assigned to the Hot Air Balloon unit of the Union Army, to sketch from the air what enemy movements he observed. He did so on April 19, 1862, during the Peninsula Campaign in Virginia. When captured, F. Cavada was sent to Libby Prison -located along the James River- by confederates, his book: *Libby Life, experiences of a Prisoner of war in Richmond* (Fernández Cavada 1864) is a crucial source of a Confederate prison. In 1863, the Libby Prison Fernandez Cavada lived in was in unacceptable human conditions. You could read about Libby in the *Richmond Enquirer*: “they (the men) are huddled up and jammed together into every nook and corner; (...) At night the floor of every room they occupy in the building is

covered, every square inch of it, (...) head to head, as tightly packed as if the prison were a huge, impossible box of nocturnal sardines.” So, this prisoner, Lieutenant-Colonel Fernandez Cavada, had nine months to sketch the living scenes in there, and write –in a caustic style- the routine happenings of confined soldiers. Fernández Cavada was finally involved in the Cuban revolution after the Civil War. Being captured by the Cuban government, he was executed (Emilio 1891).

Those are some of the women and men Spaniard and Hispanic peoples that most of them contributed to the North. Related to the Confederate Cause, Colonel Ambrosio José Gonzales was a native Cuban, who became a U.S. Citizen in 1849 and settled in Beaufort, South Carolina. Because of his actions in Fort Sumter he was appointed Lt. Colonel of artillery and Chief of Artillery in the department of South Carolina. Gonzales, submitted value plans –not thought to be applicable everywhere- for the defense of the coastal areas of his homeland state to the governor of South Carolina. Many and important battles were scene to Gonzales military actions, but he was not promoted by Commander in Chief, Jefferson Davis, which relationships with his commanders was horrible. The defeat of the Confederacy meant to Gonzales and other officials that after the war they and their families suffered impoverishment and humiliation by *carpetbag government* (Kennedy, Kennedy 2008) (McKittrick 1988: 214-252).

To Spanish parents, thought born in Florida, Michael Philip Usina was a Captain of several blockade runners, managing to avoid their capture on many successful missions. Thought he was

wounded and captured in the Battle of Manassas, Usina managed to escape and reach the Southern lines. But maybe the Hispanic in South army best known is Colonel Santos Benavides, the highest ranking Tejano officer who commanded his own regiment, the *Benavides Regiment*, and whose greatest contribution to the Confederacy was securing passage of Confederate cotton to Mexico in 1863. Santos Benavides, a former Texas Ranger commanded the Confederate 33rd Texas Cavalry, was the only Mexican colonel who fought with the Confederate Army during the Civil War.

3.1. Volunteer Troops Militias: soldiers who speaks Spanish

But most of all Spaniards acted in troop (Field 2006: 5-6). Men often enlisted in a company recruited in the counties where they lived though not always. All of Spaniards were not born in Spain or Spanish territories, as said, but US people saw them as if they were. They spoke Spanish and their names sounded Spanish: Major Salvador Vallejo or Colonel Santos Benavides, for example. The book *Vaqueros in Blue and Gray* (Thomson, Almaraz 1976) talked about them. Very well known, the 39th New York Volunteer Infantry Regiment, the "Garibaldi Guard," was mustered into the U. S. service at New York, May 28, 1861. The unit was composed of three Hungarian companies, three German, one Swiss, one Italian, one French, one Portuguese and one Spanish. The Spanish unit was the 4th D Company, and consisted of men from

different Latin American countries. Puerto Ricans and Cubans were Spanish subjects at the time and so inscribed as Spaniards.

The “New Mexico Volunteer Infantry Regiment”, the oldest militia Union organization in the New Mexico territory, consisted of five regiments -four thousand officers and soldiers. The NMV was incorporated into the Union Army shortly after the beginning of the war. Where did they come from? When the outbreak of the war almost twenty eight thousand Mexican-Americans lived in those border grounds, particularly in Texas. One Thousand joined to the Union cause and two thousand to the Confederate one, but by the end of the struggle (1865), almost ten thousand Mexican Americans had fought in US or Confederate regular armies or volunteer units. In Texas, the Union raised twelve companies of Mexican-American cavalry, originally organized into two regiments but later consolidated into one, the 1st Regiment of Texas Cavalry (Union). Thought most of the officers were non-Hispanic, several Mexican Texans served as captains, such as Clemente Zapata, Cesario Falcon, and Jose Maria Martines and lieutenants, such as Ramon Garcia Falcon, Antonio Abad Dias, Santos Cadena and Cecilio Vela. Besides serving in the “Benavides Regiment”, many Hispanics who were from Texas served in other units of the Confederate Army. Known as *Tejanos*, they fought in many Battles, as Fredericksburg or Appomattox Court House. They were members of the Sixth and Eighth Texas Infantry and of Hood's Texas Brigade.

As Hispanics were famous in their horsemanship, in 1863 the U.S. government authorized the military governor of California to raise four companies of native Hispanic Californians.

That was the 1st Battalion of Native Cavalry, formed with Major Salvador Vallejo of the California militia commanding. The battalion, with its five hundred soldiers of Spanish and Mexican origin, served throughout the Department of the Pacific in California and Arizona. It guarded supply trains, fought against pillaging bands of Confederate raiders and helped to defeat the Confederate invasion of New Mexico.

Hispanics were also well represented in Confederate units such as 6th Missouri Infantry Regiment, the 55th Alabama Infantry Regiment, the 2nd Texas Mounted Rifles, the 1st Florida Cavalry Regiment and the 33rd Texas Cavalry Regiment. Others served in the Louisiana *Zouaves Battalion*, the Spanish Legion of the European Brigade, and the Spanish Guard of Mobile, Alabama. The home guard brigade of Mobile, Alabama, made of Hispanics, was called *The Spanish Guards*. The guard served as part of the Mobile County Reserves. There were an estimated four thousand Mexican-Americans among the New Mexico volunteers. Another non-Texan unit with a number of Spanish-speaking soldiers was the 55th New York militia, *The Garde Lafayette*. The 5th Regiment of the *European Brigade* was a home guard brigade of New Orleans, Louisiana (Field 2006) made up of eight hundred Hispanics who were descendants of immigrants from the Canary Islands. The brigade, under the command of Brigadier General William E. Starke, was assigned to defend the city. Louisiana also had a brigade called the *Cazadores Espanoles Regiment* or *Spanish Hunters Regiment* and the *Louisiana Tigers*, which had men from Spain, Cuba, Puerto Rico or Mexico.

So, even if George Washington in his *Farewell Address* said that “it must be unwise in us to implicate ourselves by artificial ties in the ordinary vicissitudes of her (Europe’s) politics or the ordinary combinations and collisions of her friendships or enmities” (1796), European nations –and Spain was one of them- did now want to avoid the American dimension of its policies. From Cabinets or people, many European actors were -direct or indirect- implicated in the US Civil War, and that because no complete isolation was possible at all for the new US America.

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